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United for Quality Care

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Norwich

District 1199NE

Before the Appropriations Committee

Good Afternoon Senator Osten, Representative Walker, and members of the Committee, my name is Paulette Belin and I come to you today as an advocate for the most vulnerable population, the elderly. I also come as an advocate for myself and my co-workers. I am 58 years old and have been a CNA for 42 years. I never chose to further my education as a LPN or RN because I loved the time I spent with my residents.

In the last 42 years I have seen such a drastic change in the nursing home industry, yet I have seen NO change in the state staffing patterns. The public thinks that we take care of elderly residents with Alzheimer's & Dementia, but the truth is that it is a mixed population. Connecticut has closed one of the biggest Mental Health Institutions = Norwich State Hospital and those patients have gone to the streets and in nursing homes. We are also dealing with younger residents that have substance abuse issues and psychiatric illnesses. I am aware that this population also needs and deserves care, but I find it very unfair to our confused, frail, fearful elderly residents. We are expected to care for these challenging residents without any proper training or in-services. Many days I have been tasked with caring for 22 residents alone. If a whole family cannot care for 1 person, please tell me how I am supposed to properly care for 22?

Staffing for nursing homes is quickly disappearing everyday. Nursing home workers have and continue to work through a pandemic with little to no compensation or recognition. Nurses and CNAs have been hijacked because they cannot staff the facilities. Mandating daily takes place. You are forbidden to leave after your shift to get your kids off the bus or care for your own family. There have been many days that I said that I was not coming back. It is the ones with the cataract weakened eyes that look at me and whisper, "Thank you, I appreciate everything you do for me. I feel so bad that you girls have no help." that keeps me coming back. I am caring for broken people, when I am broken myself. Doing this hard work for 42 years has taken a toll on my body, especially my back. I cannot afford proper treatment, such as cortisone injections, nor take the time off to plan a surgery. We are underpaid and underappreciated by the company who employs me and by the state I reside in.

It is not an exaggeration to say nursing home workers have given their life to this industry. Many have died of Covid or brought Covid home to their family members who have died. Many have had car accidents driving to work through storms. The people we care for are important! These people have paved the way for all of us and deserve adequate staffing to meet their daily needs. Our younger generation of workers will not do this back-breaking work for a \$400-\$500 a week paycheck. They will go work at fast food chains, grocery stores, or the new Amazon warehouses to do less work for more money.

I urge the State of Connecticut, one of the richest states in the country, to take a look at their nursing home communities and their staff. I am asking the State to show its nursing home residents a little of the same love that the caregivers have shown this helpless community.

Please enforce staffing levels and continue to fund this industry so we can hire and keep more dedicated staff. For today this is their sick pillow, but tomorrow it could be yours or your loved one.

Thank you for your time.